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SUBJECT: NIGERIA'S KATSINA STATE HAS POSITIVE VENEER THAT
HIDES UNDERLYING CHALLENGES

REF: ABUJA 2223

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission James P. McNulty
for reasons in sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Katsina, the home state of President Umara Yar'Adua in Northern Nigeria, provides a positive, initial impression to visitors -- with the state's emphasis on infrastructure development, particularly in the education and health sectors. Interlocutors from the government, ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), universities, and civil society generally evinced overall satisfaction and pride over their state's progress in recent years during Political Officer's mid-December visit. Speaking with others in the political opposition, media, and the Christian minority, however, exposed underlying challenges, including corruption, lack of economic development, and religious tensions. END SUMMARY.

OVERALL SATISFACTION AND PRIDE

¶2. (SBU) Katsina State PDP Branch representatives, including the Administrative Secretary and Legal Adviser, told Political Officer during a mid-December visit that the state government had improved access by its citizens to water, constructed "excellent" school structures, improved power supply "significantly," and maintained road networks. Party stalwarts expressed confidence about prospects for re-election of their candidates in the next election scheduled for 2011. PDP representatives, however, eventually conceded corruption and poverty as challenges and concerns, even to the extent that civil servants barely earned enough to support their families. Overall, they expressed satisfaction with the quality of the state civil service, which they described as having competent and educated members, but criticized many in the political elite as unqualified.

¶3. (SBU) Separately, Political Affairs Permanent Secretary Rabiu Gambo told PolOff that current Governor Ibrahim Shema had pledged to complete projects begun during the tenure of his predecessor, who had served two terms as Governor (from 1999 until 2007) before becoming Nigeria's President. Gambo insisted that the government had succeeded in providing infrastructure development, education and vocational training, and health care. Regarding challenges the government faced, Gambo said Katsina's geographical location

left it vulnerable to desertification, which, when combined with high adult illiteracy, resulted in low incomes among members of the state's predominately agricultural society. He said the government would like to promote a paradigm shift away from government dependency to a "cottage industry" society.

¶4. (U) Students, academics, and members of civil society all generally expressed support for their government. Only one student at a roundtable discussion voiced dissatisfaction with government performance on electoral reforms, education, and power supply. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University Deputy Vice Chancellor Dr. Bilyaminu Idris applauded the government's advances in education. Similarly Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) Katsina Branch Secretary General Safiya Usman commended government efforts on educating and training youth, both through formal education and vocational training at the newly-created craft village.

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UNDERLYING CHALLENGES

¶5. (C) Despite the generally positive image that most interlocutors depicted, "Leadership" newspaper journalist Lawal Saidu criticized the state government, telling PolOff that Shema's administration represented just "an extension of the last." He said Shema continued work on projects initiated by then Governor Yar'Adua, but had limited his development objectives, reportedly to avoid the appearance of

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"outdoing" his predecessor. Saidu remarked that, while the government had improved the infrastructure of some schools, the quality of education had not improved. Availability of water also remained a big challenge throughout the state.

ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

¶6. (C) Similarly, interlocutors provided differing perspectives on relations between the state's Muslim majority and Christian minority. Katsina State Permanent Secretary for Religious Affairs Ibrahim Musa Anda told PolOff that his state had not experienced any major sectarian crises, because officials consistently provided religious groups with opportunities to express their views. He remarked that implementation of Shari'a law occurred without conflict because the state Shari'a Commission conducted a well-managed public awareness campaign. According to Anda, various Muslim sects operated in Katsina without conflict, and Christians and Muslims integrated into the same neighborhoods without forming "Sabon Gari" ("strangers' quarters") as happened in some cities in other states. While Anda acknowledged that the government had constructed some mosques, he defended such activities as maintaining such places of worship free from manipulation by political parties.

BUT UNDERLYING TENSIONS

¶7. (C) Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Northwest Zone Secretary Gambo Dauda offered a different perspective during a December 17 meeting with PolOff in Katsina, noting that religious tensions existed, despite relative peace and lack of major conflicts between Christians and Muslims. (N.B.: In addition to Katsina, the CAN Northwest Zone includes Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara States.) Dauda claimed that discrimination, while not conspicuous, still occurred against Christians. He cited the following six examples: (1) government prohibition of the sale of land for construction of churches, which, he said, forced

Christians to convert their residences (illegally) into places of worship; (2) greater prevalence of development programs, including construction of hospitals, renovation or construction of schools, and access to water, in rural Muslim communities than in rural Christian communities; (3) lack of equal access by Christians to education in specialized schools and universities; (4) compulsory study of Islamic religious education in public schools by Christians while denying them access to Christian religious education; (5) declining financial support each year for Christian pilgrimages to Israel and non-functioning of an associated pilgrimage board; and (6) lack of access by Christians to equal employment opportunities, particularly in the police and military services. Part of the problem, he said, stemmed from Shari'a law prohibiting non-Muslims from holding authoritative positions, thereby denying Christians opportunities to express and promote their views within the state government.

18. (C) According to Dauda, Katsina has avoided religious conflict, thus far, because the Christian community in Katsina has remained dedicated to living peacefully with neighbors, while local Muslim traditional leaders have attempted to accommodate Christian neighbors. He noted, however, that, if underlying tensions continued to build, they could lead to inter-religious violence. Dauda, who noted his mixed religious background with one Christian and five Muslim siblings, said he wanted to establish a forum for promoting discussions between Christians and Muslims in Katsina as a means to promote mutual understanding and respect.

NOT EVERYONE SUPPORTS PDP

19. (C) Not everyone in Katsina, however, supported the ruling PDP, including ex-PDP founding member and former governor of former Kaduna State Alhaji Lawal Kaita, who expressed passion for establishment of an opposition "mega-party." Kaita, who now supported the opposition Action Congress, expressed confidence in the opposition's ability to challenge the

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ruling PDP. He explained that ultimately the opposition "mega-party" aimed to form a political base in the Nigeria's North with sufficient strength to challenge the PDP. Nigerians, he asserted, could no longer accept election-rigging and had become "fed up" with the ruling party. He expressed optimism at prospects of success by "mega-party" candidates at all levels of government in the 2011 national elections. (Please see Septel for details.)

COMMENT

110. (C) Predictably, PDP government officials and many residents in President Yar'Adua's home state towed the ruling party line and supported their state government, which has provided many benefits as a result of their native son occupying the Presidency. Academia's strong support likely resulted from then Governor Yar'Adua's strong personal support of the local university, which he helped construct and name. The government's theme of "continuity" (which the government emphasized by pasting this word on billboards between the faces of President Yar'Adua and Governor Shema), fostered an appreciation in citizens for the completion of government projects begun during Yar'Adua's tenure. That said, the President's ailing health weighed on the minds of many residents, who remained concerned about their possible impending loss of patronage from Abuja. (Please see Reftel for details.)

111. (C) Political Specialist, who also visited relatives in Katsina in mid-December, later expressed surprise at the

amount of new construction and infrastructure in the state capital during the past several years. Both he and PolOff came away with positive impressions of the city's infrastructure. Yet, the positive veneer also hid underlying issues that required addressing -- ranging from electoral reform to economic development to religious co-existence. While the state government maintained excellent roads and infrastructure, it fell short in other areas of the President's Seven Point Agenda -- ultimately sharing many of the country's overall shortcomings.

SANDERS